

2008 State

The UNOFFICIAL Beijing Olympics Blog

Bible rumour bashing

Posted November 8, 2007 by chinamatics

Categories: [PR](#), [beijing](#), [boycott](#), [human rights](#), [media](#), [religion](#)

Erroneous reports circulated this week that China was going to ban bibles from the Olympic Village. Sound a bit curious? Well, here's how the story unfolded.

Here's how the story began. First Gazzetta dello Sport reported it, and this was picked up by the [Catholic News Agency](#):

Organizers of the 2008 Olympics in Beijing have published a list of prohibited objects in the Olympic village where athletes will stay. To the surprise of many, Bibles are among the objects that will not be allowed. According to the Italian daily La Gazzetta dello Sport, organizers have cited security reasons and have prohibited athletes from bearing any kind of religious symbol at Olympic facilities. Other objects on the list include video cameras and cups.

This story was then picked up by Fox News, at which point it received broader notice among Christian media and blogs. Here is a [Christian Post](#) report:

The Bible is on a list of items - which include video cameras and cups - prohibited at the 2008 Summer Olympics, according to Fox News. This means Christian athletes will not have access to Bibles in their Olympic village housing.

Moreover, the communist and officially atheist country is banning all religious symbols at Olympic facilities in Beijing and warning visitors to not bring more than one copy of the Bible with them to China.

"The banning of Bibles and religious symbols by athletes in the Olympic Village by the Chinese government is evidence that it has not progressed to the level of civility that is worthy of hosting the international Olympic games," the Rev. Dr. Keith Roderick, Washington

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representative for *Christian Solidarity International*, told *The Christian Post*.

At this point [The Associated Press](#) took notice, and decided to investigate whether there was in fact any truth to the bible ban:

The U.S. Olympic Committee received confirmation from Olympic officials on Wednesday that there will be no restrictions on Bibles being brought into the Olympic village in Beijing next year.

The USOC contacted the International Olympic Committee about the issue in response to a story posted on the Catholic News Agency Web site citing a list of prohibited items that was reported to include Bibles.

USOC spokesman Darryl Seibel said the federation contacted the IOC about the news reports. "We have heard from the IOC and there will be no restriction on athletes bringing the Bible or any other religious book into the village for their personal use," he said.

Seibel said the Beijing Organizing Committee never considered any ban on Bibles.

So in fact, there is no bible ban.

One has to wonder who in their right mind would actually think China would do something so stupid as ban bibles at the Olympics? I mean seriously, like Beijing isn't having enough PR trouble without getting on the wrong side of God.

And second, did nobody stop to think the list might be a touch suspect when they considered items two and three? That's right: as well as bibles, video cameras and cups were to be banned. Yes...cups.

Even for Fox News, that's some mediocre fact-checking.

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Plus ca change

Posted October 22, 2007 by chinamatics

Categories: [PR](#), [beijing](#), [china](#), [media](#)

Jacques Rogge, head of the IOC, said he hoped the Olympics will "[contribute to the evolution of China](#)".

Liu Binjie, China's minister of the general administration of press and publication, likes it just the way it is.

After announcing that foreign papers could be distributed during the games, he then warned in [the China Daily](#) that this was only a temporary lifting of the ban - "the direction has been set", was the

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rather ominous quote.

He then began discussing the importance of Chinese media organisations listing overseas:

Liu said authorities were also pushing for public share issues by government news websites... and that any newspaper that successfully reformed its corporate structure could list in China or overseas.

A financial decision, you would think, given the media industry is probably the single most underdeveloped industry in the country? Oh no. Liu was speaking at the Party Congress, and he had clearly been inspired the dizzying rhetoric inside the Great Hall of the People:

"By being listed they can raise capital and boost their strength, further extending the reach of our propaganda policies."

Just like Fight Club, the first rule about propaganda is don't talk about propaganda. Why? Because, also just like Fight Club, it scares the bejesus out of people.

The Chinese word for propaganda is xuanchuan (宣传), which handily can just as accurately be translated as "communication". Liu's quote could easily have been translated "extend the reach of our communication policies", or even, simply, "improve our communication". Is this twisting his words? It's a tough call – it's hard to know the exact context of the use of the word xuanchuan.

Nevertheless, it comes off very badly, and, moving even further away from the Olympics, this raises a further point. Instead of Liu merely attempting to "extend the reach of his propaganda policies" he should first try to improve his propaganda.

If even he can't come out of a China Daily story smelling of rose, you know there's a problem somewhere. Just call me Milton Friedman, but the Chinese media desperately needs some outside competition to force it to up its game – even if already "the direction has been set".

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At last, a swimming breakthrough

Posted October 20, 2007 by chinamatics

Categories: [Uncategorized](#)

After a dismal performance at the world championships in Melbourne last year, it seemed next summer would be coming too soon for the Chinese swim team.

Maybe not, [according to Reuters](#):

China's Li Yang has bettered the women's 50 metres backstroke record at the world military games which concludes in India on Saturday, the organisers said. Li clocked 28:09 seconds to win the final on Friday, going under the existing mark of 28.16, according to the games website.

In Australia and the US, the top two swimming nations, China is treated with enormous suspicion, dating back to a series of positive dope tests after the 1994 world championships when China came out of nowhere to win 14 golds. With so much pressure on China's athletes – and coaches and officials – to win medals next summer, many in the sport have long predicted a Chinese breakout in 2008.

Melbourne – where China won one silver medal and a bronze – seemed to dispel that myth, though the Australian swim coach John Leonard **still insisted that the Chinese were holding back**, making references to a 'secret training camp'.

This seemed a little far fetched – but many more performances like Li's in the build-up to the games and you can bet a few eyebrows will be raised. In swimming of course, young women often burst onto the scene in spectacular fashion and then disappear just as quickly – it's a very small window of physical peak for, well, pretty much anyone who isn't **Inge de Bruin**.

However, it should be noted that Li is 20, relatively old for a breakout. By contrast, **Luo Xuejuan** was 17 when she won the world championships in 2001, and after her gold medal aged 20 in Athens she never reached that level again and is now retired, citing heart trouble. This is not to say there is definitely something suspicious about Li's record – only that it deserves closer inspection not just to see if it is valid, but also if it might be a precursor to more performances like this from Chinese swimmers.

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Warning: Don't build up the buildings too much

Posted October 8, 2007 by chinamatics

Categories: [architecture](#), [beijing](#), [design](#), [hype](#), [media](#), [venues](#)

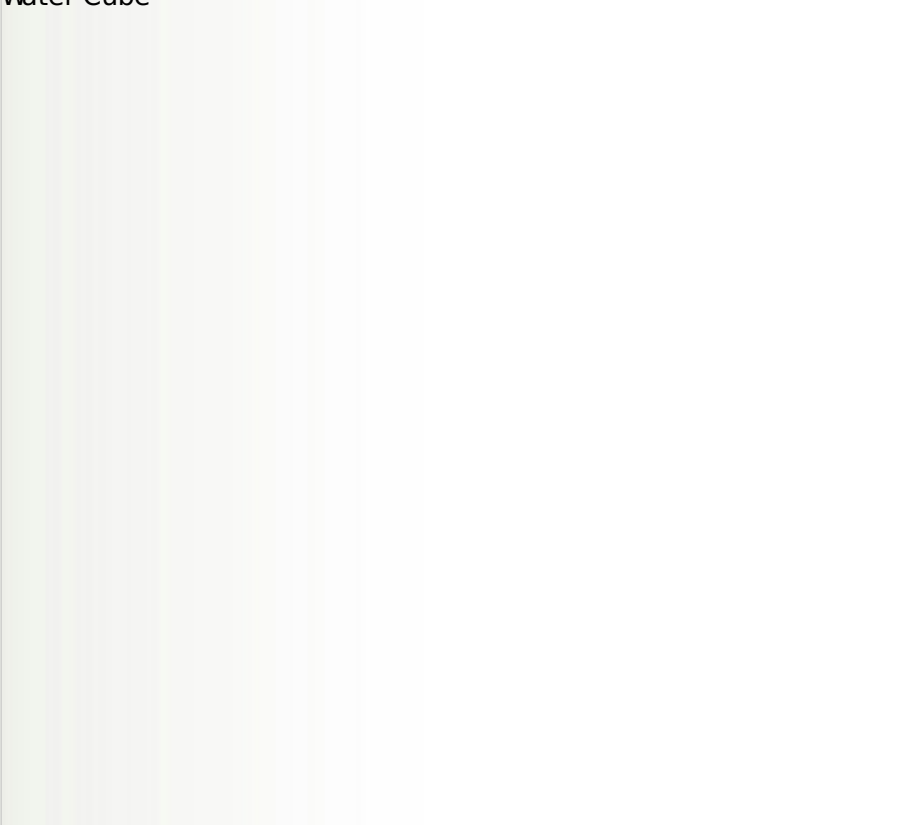
I stumbled across CCTV-9 at the tail end of my news channels, and lo-and-behold it was **Dialogue** time. The topic for discussion was "Olympics heralds new age in architecture in Beijing" – or something along those lines. I didn't pay much attention because I know from experience that the show is indescribably boring, but I couldn't help but disagree with the basic contention of the, ahem, debate.

The Olympics is not the spark for a new age of architecture in Beijing: The spark has been a decade of 10% economic growth, a total lack of planning laws and **ego**. The Olympics is merely the biggest and most hyped project in this building spree.

Some structures are worthy of the hype: the Water Cube is

spectacular and wickedly clever, and best of all, instead of becoming just another Olympic white elephant next September it is being turned into a water park with wave machines and so forth – inspired.


Water Cube



The Water Cube: Believe the Hype*

However, other structures are hugely over-rated. It seems as though one is legally obliged to heap lavish praise upon the main stadium, the Bird's Nest, but I cannot begin to fathom why. Anyone who has spent more than ten minutes in Beijing knows that the city needs another giant grey mess of concrete like San Francisco needs [The Big One](#).

Birds Nest



Bird's Nest: Don't believe the hype

It's the curse of modern design: all new buildings look brilliant on the architect's digital mock-up, but the 22-hours a day they aren't lit up like a Bangkok strip-joint they are mundane beyond belief. The Bird's Nest is the ultimate example of this: on your typical grey Beijing day, it is absolutely hideous. The same goes with the new airport: on the mock-up it looks a series of futuristic, red metallic pods – but in reality the thing looks like it's already rusting.

Airport



Beijing's New Airport: Already rusting?

Another curious aspect of the Olympic project is the renovation of the Workers Stadium: what use does it have anymore? Unless local side Beijing Guo'an suddenly start selling 60,000 tickets a game, or football is specifically banned from the Bird's Nest, it now seems rather obsolete. Furthermore, it sits on a prime city-centre spot – good for either balancing the Olympic books or creating public space and sporting facilities in the city proper.



Workers Stadium: What's it good for? Absolutely nothing...

Beyond the Water Cube there ARE some great looking venues being built in Beijing – but overall it's a nice example of the broader situation in the city. For every stunning new building there's an absolute shocker, and all the while a lack of a unifying style or design aim.

A case, perhaps, of I say hodgepodge, you say kaleidoscope.

**Images stolen via Google*

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Blinks 308

Posted October 5, 2007 by chinamatics

Categories: [beijing](#), [blinks](#), [human rights](#), [korea](#), [media](#)

[South and North Koreans to travel by train to Beijing Olympics](#)

North and South Korea are about to create their first "official" joint cheering squad for an international sports event. Even better, the cheering squad is going to go to the 2008 Beijing Olympics via the Seoul-Sinuiju railway connecting North and South Korea.

The North and South Koreans who have cheered on each others' teams at winter and summer Olympic events and at the Asian Games and various world championships have merely cheered 'together' in a pre-agreed but unofficial capacity, with sports audiences from the two Koreas arriving separately and gathering as events began.

The issue of a joint team has yet to be finalised, but until then, I guess a joint cheering squad is gonna have to suffice. Baby steps...

“After the Olympics, God knows what will happen,” Jerome Cohen, a professor at New York University, told the Hong Kong Foreign Correspondents’ Club. “If they are allowing beatings of all these lawyers — and there are many ... now, in the glare of publicity that accompanies Darfur and Zimbabwe and Burma, what will they do when they don’t have the Olympics as a potential goal that they want to achieve?”

Gradually the international media is moving to the conclusion that China’s policy of non-intervention in other nations’ internal affairs is utterly disengenious: you can’t be the biggest trade partner of somewhere like Burma and then turn around and say that nothing that goes on there has anything to do with you. It’s easy to get bogged down in the particular human rights issues, but increased understanding in international media of some of the broader themes will be a benefit of the games.

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It’s an Olympic story, but not as we know it

Posted October 2, 2007 by chinamatics

Categories: [NOOS](#), [PR](#), [beijing](#), [boycott](#), [bureaucrazy](#), [china](#), [human rights](#), [media](#), [past games](#)

The amount of coverage for the upcoming 2008 Beijing Olympic Games is already vast, and quite right for an event the hosts consider so profoundly important.

Every games has suffered at the hands of non-sporting storylines – lack of readiness ahead of Athens, aboriginal rights before Sydney, the grand sell-out before Atlanta – but Beijing is taking the Non-Olympic Olympic Story to a whole new level.

There are two types of Non-Olympic Olympic Story – those originating from the foreign media, and those coming from the hosts themselves. Here are two examples from Agence France-Presse on Monday:

Foreign media – [China arrests cyber-dissident](#)

China has formally arrested writer and cyber-dissident Lu Gengsong, a former lecturer turned activist, on suspicion of subverting state power, his wife said Monday. “The charges are groundless,” said his wife. “The provincial and city governments just want to make him shut up.” Lu, a 51-year-old freelance writer, has published extensively on graft, including the book “Corrupted Officials in China,” which appeared in Hong Kong in 2000.

Hardly a sign of blossoming free speech in China for sure, but entirely unconnected to the games next summer, you would think?

Lu was picked up at his home in August, in what rights groups said was part of a crackdown ahead of this month's Communist Party five-yearly Congress and the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Despite China's pledge to ease curbs on media and individual freedoms ahead of the 2008 Olympics, human and media rights groups say the leaders in Beijing continue to tighten their crackdown on dissent amid increasing social unrest.

The closest the report comes to an Olympic connection is through the issue of illegal evictions, of which Lu was a critic and of which Beijing authorities have been accused, although not directly involving Olympic projects.

However, there are no specifics about the alleged pre-Olympic crackdown, nothing about Lu's criticism of the Olympics (if any), and nothing on a particular Olympic-related illegal eviction. To top it all, he was arrested in Hangzhou, not Beijing.

Here is example two, a host-inspired Non-Olympic Olympic Story:

Beijing to close 1,000 small coal mines before Olympics

Olympic host Beijing plans to close down at least 1,000 small unlicensed coal mines and sack all the workers ahead of next year's Games, state media reported Monday. All illegal coal mines in the vicinity of the city have been ordered to stop operations immediately, dismantle their equipment, fire their workers and hand in explosives within 15 days, the Xinhua news agency reported.

If these coal mines were in Beijing then perhaps the Olympic connection would be clear. However, the locations of the mines are not specified, and one can only assume they are scattered through major coal belts in areas such as Shanxi.

Xinhua did not explain why the mines had to be closed ahead of the 2008 Olympics. But officials could be motivated by fears over the bad publicity if a mining disaster was to happen in the run-up to or during the Games.

This is a nice example of the way every single government department is feeling the need to show its support for the games through policy. This time it's the beautifully abbreviated State Administration of Work Safety (SAWS), but every department has been at it. The Forestry bureau has planted extra trees for the Olympics,

education departments have begun Olympic classes, security departments have brand new Olympic anti-terrorism drills.

The problem with something like SAWS doing its Olympic bit is that it can only lose. If there is a coal mine accident then the Olympic promises were a house of cards, if nothing happens then everyone will assume the mines are just as lethal as before.

A concern for BOCOG is whether international media will ever get beyond the talk of boycotts, media freedom and Non-Olympic Olympic Stories like the ones above.

They did in Sydney, thanks to some excellent sporting action and the way the Australian fans packed every stadium to the rafters. But they didn't in Athens where, with the paint still drying and the two biggest local sports stars involved in a drug scandal, local fans stayed away and athletes competed unmemorably in half-empty stadia.

The one thing about the Beijing games is that, even if the international media don't wear themselves out with the Non-Olympic Olympic Stories and the boycotts, the Games will be a sell-out and the sport will be terrific. The unprecedented hype has gotten to the athletes as well – just ask USA's basketball team or Roger Federer how much more they want to win in Beijing than they did in Athens.

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No pressure Liu, just don't screw up

Posted September 30, 2007 by chinamatics

Categories: [athletics](#), [china](#), [liu xiang](#)

Some bad ideas:

Avram Grant

Anything done by Michael Vick

An entire nation of 1.3 billion placing their 2008 hopes on the outcome of the 110m hurdles.

Allow me to explain the final bad idea, using these two videos:

Exhibit A: Liu wins gold at the World Championships in Osaka

Exhibit B: Liu gets beaten in last Friday's Shanghai Grand Prix

A couple of weeks apart with similar line-ups, albeit with Liu out in Lane 9 in Osaka and in Lane 5 in Shanghai, these two races show just what a lottery the 110m hurdles is. Liu gets off to a good start in both races, but then it all happens at the crucial second hurdle. In Osaka Liu nails it, ensuring he has the perfect rhythm for the rest of the race, but in Shanghai he clips it, and, with his rhythm disturbed, he can never get back on pace with Robles, an up-an-coming Cuban.

It was a matter of millimetres, but in a race of such microscopic margins, that's all it took to knock Liu off top spot. It all went rather quiet in Shanghai, but if the same thing happens in Beijing next summer you'll be able to hear a commemorative *fuwa* pin drop.

That's the problem with the 110m hurdles – there are more variables than in any other race. Just ask Colin Jackson – dominant hurdler and

world record holder throughout the 1990s, but never an Olympic champion. Or [look what happened to Gail Devers](#) at the Barcelona Games in 1992.

A bit like Lewis Hamilton in F1, whenever Liu has been faced with a new challenge he has pulled a huge performance out of the bag. Olympics? Check. World Record? Check. World Championships? Check. But the pressure he'll experience in Beijing is unlike any that which athlete will have experienced before him.

Knowing him he'll go and win it, but his 1.3 billion fans need to understand that at every hurdle he's only a millimetre or two away from second place.

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Blinks 315

Posted September 28, 2007 by chinamatics

Categories: [basketball](#), [blinks](#), [china](#), [doping](#), [football](#), [human rights](#)

Today's recommended Olympic-related reading.

[SCMP: Pound bullish on drugs-free Games in 2008](#)

"The Chinese have done all that Wada asked of them a year ago. Their system for testing their athletes is professional and has had made huge progress in the number of tests carried out ... I'm satisfied," said Pound after a meeting with top officials from the Chinese Sports Ministry.

When Dick Pound – sorry – *Dick Pound* is happy, you know you're doing something right.

[Reuters: EU should boycott Beijing Olympics over Myanmar](#)

"The consensus around the European Parliament is that China is the key. China is the puppet master of Burma," vice president of the European Parliament Edward McMillan-Scott said. "The Olympics is the only real lever we have to make China act. The civilized world must seriously consider shunning China by using the Beijing Olympics to send the clear message that such abuses of human rights are not acceptable."

Screw Darfur – this bandwagon's the one for me!

[Reuters: Stop crying and focus on the Olympics, Chinese women told](#)

"The road is still long. I hope you can now dry your eyes," Monday's Beijing News quoted Xie Yalong, a vice-

chairman of the Chinese Football Association, as saying. "After all, there is still the 2008 Olympics. Although everyone feels bad at the moment, there's nothing that can be done, life goes on," Xie said.

Nobody can quite decide if the Steel Roses did very well at the World Cup, or if they heaped shame on the nation by failing to meet an arbitrary and unrealistic semifinal target. My two *jiao*: International football, like politics, is all about momentum – and the Chinese women's team, after a decade of going hopelessly backwards, is finally going forwards. One suspects it's too little too late for next summer though – so yeah, let's ~~burn the bitch~~ sack the newly-appointed coach.

China Daily: Olympic team to be biggest yet

A total of 498 Chinese athletes from 202 events had qualified and it is thought another 50 to 70 will join them by next August. The delegation will be significantly bigger than past teams, after 345 athletes were sent to the 2004 Athens Games and about 300 to Sydney seven years ago. But China will not be the biggest squad next year because the US Olympic Committee plans to send a team of about 600 athletes.

Reuters/ Guardian: King James eyes NBA, Olympic crowns

"I think it's a big challenge for us, and I think it's going to be a great experience trying to bring USA basketball back on top...to try to help change what's going on with the USA basketball team and bring it back to dominance."

I've said it before and I'll say it again: the biggest contest next summer won't be on the track or in the pool, it'll be on the court. Team USA wants it BAD.

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The internet marketing race is on

Posted September 28, 2007 by chinamatics

Categories: [china](#), [corporate](#), [internet](#), [media](#)

[The Olympian](#) reports on the battle going on between two of China's top internet portals, Sina and Sohu:

Sohu, the Internet content sponsor of the Beijing Games, claims that online ads from other sponsors with the Beijing Olympics logo can only appear on its website, while arch rival Sina says it plans to boost its

Olympic content development and marketing to attract all kinds of advertisers. Both companies are listed on the Nasdaq.

Adding insult to injury, Sina and its partners have contested Sohu's claim of exclusivity. They say Sohu's sponsorship only entitles it to create the official website for BOCOG and to use the Beijing Games logo of a running man in its marketing.

It's an interesting situation: ultra controlled Olympic image rights meets the wild world of the Chinese web.

The Chinese internet is **notorious** for the 'sharing' of information. It's called 'zhuanzai' (转载) and it basically means information is liable to be reproduced anywhere, anytime. At the beginning of the year Beijing News got so fed up with one portal, Tom.com, taking their news that they **filed a lawsuit** seeking damages.

The Olympics is becoming a nice little test case for the legality of what goes on the Chinese web:

As the situation grows increasingly tense, Olympic organizers have found it necessary to intervene. They have confirmed Sohu's marketing rights as an Olympic sponsor, such as its eligibility to use the Olympic logo, while promising crackdowns on "ambush marketing," which occurs when a company tries to establish or imply an association with the Games without paying any royalties.

Sina has since toned down its "Olympic marketing" publicity campaign. Yet banners from Olympic sponsors featuring the logo of a runner can still be seen on sina.com.

Sohu must be disappointed as Olympic marketing officials have yet to confirm it owns the exclusive rights to carry online ads from other Olympic sponsors. The company has made significant cash and service investments in BOCOG, estimated at \$30 million by some media reports, to become the Internet sponsor of the Games, the first of its kind in Olympic history.*

Interfax previously reported that it is not just Sina who are unhappy with Sohu:

Chinese portal Web sites Sina, Tencent and NetEase announced last week that they are forming an alliance to challenge another Chinese portal, Sohu, over its claim to hold exclusive rights to publishing Olympic-related online advertising.

In November 2005, Sohu signed an exclusivity contract

with the Beijing Olympic Games Organizing Committee to be the exclusive Internet sponsor of the 2008 Beijing Games. According to the organizing committee, Sohu would head up construction and operation of the official Olympics Web site. No other details of the confidential agreement were released.

The most telling comment came from Tencent:

Liu Shengyi, a vice-president of Tencent, said that Tencent respected Sohu's interests as a sponsor of the games, and was trying to verify just what rights Sohu held. As Tencent understood it, Sohu only held the rights to the official Olympics site, home page promotion and other offline marketing activities.

Sohu's response, meanwhile, was extremely defensive:

"Cooperative partners and sponsors of the 2008 Beijing Olympics who want to advertise on the Internet, sponsor Internet media columns, or launch a marketing campaign linked with the Olympic brand have to choose Sohu," Sohu said.

The problem with this statement is that it just does not seem at all realistic. An official sponsor like, say, Adidas, spent tens of millions of dollars for the right to use the official logo for marketing purposes. The IOC isn't going to turn around and tell Adidas that they can only in fact advertise on Sohu – it simply won't happen. Adidas WLL advertise on Tencent (who run QQ) and Sina, as both of these portals get more hits than Sohu.

China's internet portals hold interest beyond mere online geekery because of how huge they are going to become. Young Chinese do not read newspapers and NEVER will because they've not grown up in the culture. The future of the Chinese media is online, and because China is what it is, the line between business and politics is a particularly hard one to draw. It's doubly hard at Sina of course – where a former CEO is Mao Daolin, internet entrepreneur and son-in-law of President Hu Jintao.

Sohu may be the official internet partner of BOCOG, but that doesn't mean Sina can play down the event in favour of Premier League football or another event where it is the primary online rights holder. They MUST give the Olympics primacy – and if the cost is trampling all over someone else's exclusivity agreement, then so be it.

** \$30 million figure is contested – Interfax, for example, has it at just \$6.5 million.*

A profitable Games, give or take \$40 billion

Posted September 27, 2007 by chinamatics

Categories: [London 2012](#), [china](#), [costs](#), [future games](#), [media](#)

Reports Reuters:

Beijing Games should make profit – consultant

The Beijing Olympics should still make a profit despite a 30 percent rise in costs since the Chinese capital won the right to host the Games in 2001, according to a senior adviser to the organisers.

Wei Jizhong, who was a member of the bid committee and now advises the Beijing Organising Committee for Olympic Games (BOCOG), said the rise from the original estimate of \$1.65 billion to the anticipated costs of \$2.1 billion was “normal”.

But then comes the catch:

The \$2.1 billion estimated bill does not, however, include the estimated \$35-40 billion Beijing is spending on upgrading the city’s infrastructure and improving the environment.

So actually, the Games are going to make a financial loss of about \$40 billion.

Of course with the Beijing Games profit was never the object – there are bigger issues at stake. And then there is the fact that, as the capital city of a massive nation with an economy growing at over 10 %, Beijing would be spending big on infrastructure anyway.

But compare the casual acceptance of the increased costs – “*I think the people can put their hearts at ease*” – with the [uproar](#) over the escalating costs in London:

“It is inexcusable that the Government failed to budget accurately for VAT and contingency or make a proper estimate of security costs. I fear that other good causes will pay for their financial incompetence,” said Hugh Robertson, Shadow Sports Minister.

These are indeed two wildly different Olympic beasts...

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